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Bach to the Future: An Exploration of Authenticity and Baroque Performance Practice Through BWV 131 & BWV 111

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Bach to the Future: An Exploration of Authenticity and Baroque Performance Practice Through

BWV 131 & BWV 111

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of the Arts

of Bard College

by

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To Dominique

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Introduction

Today, Western classical musicians who perform in symphony orchestras are taught to play in a certain style. However, this style that is familiar to the modern ear doesn't exactly translate into different periods of music. If the modern musician wants to perform Baroque music, they have to re-learn stylistic elements such as bowing, embellishments, and phrasing, not to mention improvisation. All this is only if the musician is willing to re-learn these aspects in the first place. But how historically accurate are these stylistic elements? And what happens when performers choose to favor some elements over others?

I have chosen to look at historical performance by comparing different recordings because it is a more hands-on approach to this topic. It is good to see these parts of historical performance being practiced in the “real world” as opposed to only looking at the scores and engaging the theory. Written works are also essential to this process, but what is music if it isn't being performed and enjoyed? Bruce Haynes writes:

We normally like to think of the work as the written object because it has a fixed, stable form. We talk about the ‘music’ on the stand. But the notes on the page aren't a work; in fact, they aren't music at all. They are merely a recipe for performers to follow—a cookbook. It's like trying to eat a cookbook; there is a missing step in-between. Theoreticians of various kinds like to argue this point, but to people who actually musick, ¹ who listen or perform, it is self-evident that a work takes on its definition in performance. Musical meaning doesn't exist until the moment of ‘reception,’ the moment a piece is performed or heard.²

¹ Haynes uses Christopher Small's term “musicking” here, includes “all musical activity from composing to performing to listening to a Walkman to singing in the shower—even cleaning up after a concert is a kind of musicking” (Haynes 15).

² Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-first Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

Music needs to be played in order to exist; that is its purpose. By comparing these performances, scholars can witness the choices to maintain “authenticity” applied in the real world, and witness the impacts of these choices.

Baroque music is different from Romantic music in that it focuses more on evoking emotions in the audience. Gardiner writes about the importance of language in the Lutheran church: “[Martin] Luther had been determined to make religious experience vivid to his fellow Germans through language that was colloquial, lucid and rhythmic, capable at times of rising to emotional heights with sudden urgent phrases, but also of reinforcing shared identities and absorbing the full mythology of a collective past.”³ J.S. Bach was operating in the Lutheran church, and his music was in line with these ideas. “The specific task of music, as defined by Luther, is to give expression and added eloquence to biblical texts...As two of God’s most powerful gifts to humanity, words and music must be forged into one invisible and indivisible force...”⁴ Cantatas combine text and music to convey a message to the listener. The addition of music makes a greater impact on the audience because it can evoke emotions in the audience, which makes the message stronger.

The Bach scholar and conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner writes about Bach’s use of rhetoric: “In his imaginative response to Luther’s text, Bach makes us aware that music can do so much more than merely mirror the words from start to finish: he shows that it can hold our attention and captivate us by metaphors that strike like lightning. As long as we are willing to let go and allow him to describe the world to us as he sees it, we are soon provided with a first point

³ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 28.

⁴ *Ibid*, 129.

of entry.”⁵ Gardiner is in awe of the way Bach using music illuminates the text. Bach’s compositional skills allow him to dramatize the texts and leave an impression on the listeners. The conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt also confirms Bach’s exceptional use of rhetoric: “It is a known fact that Bach consciously designed his works on the basis of rhetoric: as far as he was concerned, ‘music that speaks’ (i.e., according to the rules of rhetoric) was the only form of music.”⁶ Bach was highly conscious of the way his compositions would make people feel. It is something that performers of his cantatas must keep in mind when deciding which historical aspects to include in their performance. This idea of cantatas conveying meaning through music and words is an important one. Bach was a master at this, and different performers approach this task differently.

⁵ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 133.

⁶ Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *The Musical Dialogue: Thoughts on Montiverdi, Bach and Mozart*, trans. Mary O’Neill (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1989), 37.

Chapter 1: Historical Performance Practice & Bach

When it comes to performing early music, many musicians and scholars like to throw around the term “authentic.” But what does this term mean exactly? Musicologist Bruce Haynes defines the term “authentic” as “historically accurate and credible.”⁷ This means that it is historically accurate and is backed up by evidence. There are many historians that argue against authenticity and see it as an impossible goal: “Leonhardt also argued against labelling interpretations 'authentic'. He pointed out that there were thousands of authentic performances because now, just like then, every subsequent performance is a different one.”⁸ My belief is that we should try and replicate the authentic conditions as much as we can with the resources available to us—whether that means a specialty baroque ensemble full of historical instruments, or employing *Affekt* and using 18th-century phrasings. When it comes to professional musicians or musicians trying to sound professional (so virtually all performers), the bar is much higher. Every performance offers a different interpretation of the music, and therefore a different perspective on historical performance practice. Some strive to be as authentic as possible but end up losing the emotion. Some sacrifice authenticity for emotion, or to play to the modern listener. Whatever the case, the stances on historical authenticity vary greatly within the community.

Why is it so difficult for performers today to play early music authentically? In addition to using different instruments, contemporary performers are trained in a playing style that is very different from the style of Bach’s time. The line of performance tradition from Bach to

⁷ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer’s History of Music for the Twenty-first Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

⁸ Dorottya Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice, 1945-1975: A Comprehensive Review of Sound Recordings and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2017), 6.

modern-day students has been broken. Performers today have obviously never lived in eighteenth-century Germany and did not bear witness to how music was performed then. Will

Crutchfield writes about the performance tradition:

...by the fact of our revivalist orientation, we have strained—perhaps broken, and certainly weakened—the link that used to exist between the compositional style and the performing style of a thriving musical culture. The nature of this link is difficult even to understand today, but if you were an Italian singer in 1888, you did not think of singing Rossini style for Rossini and Mozart style for Mozart and Verdi style for Verdi. You just *sang*.⁹

Performers back then didn't have to consciously think about what period of music they were playing, they just automatically knew how to play. Over the years, this performance tradition has slowly changed, and it is not automatic to the modern-day performer. This is why performers today have to make a conscious effort to evoke the performance style of the time—it is not inherent.

Robert P. Morgan writes that tradition usually views the past as “...a steady, chronologically ordered succession leading directly up to the present (and ultimately beyond it to the future).”¹⁰ He compares this to a long corridor that the musician walks through while picking up whatever remains of an enduring tradition.¹¹ This is a more linear, simplistic way of looking at the past. The past forms part of the present and influences it. He then describes the past as a large mansion with numerous rooms that aren't separated by corridors, which means that

⁹ Will Crutchfield, “Fashion, Conviction, and Performance Style in An Age of Revivals,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22.

¹⁰ Robert P. Morgan, “Tradition, Anxiety, and the Current Musical Scene,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

traditions that are further back in time are more immediately accessible. The musician can enter whatever room they want and take what they need.¹² He then refines this metaphor to say the past is like a computer where everything in its memory is equally accessible. This obscures the difference between past and present.¹³ These metaphors illustrate the different ways musicians can see the past and traditions. Tradition can be viewed in a linear sense, that can be broken and revived over time, or it can be seen as something we can come back to in the present, along with traditions from other time periods. In the corridor example, the past is viewed as fixed, and the musician can be influenced by the present tradition. The examples with the mansion and computer take a different approach, one that is more fluid. The past exists in the present, and not chronologically.

Bruce Haynes' comments on chronocentrism and tradition are revealing towards this attitude of seeing the present style of music as the best:

To musicians of the traditional school, there is only one performing style: their own. Fashions, and knowledge of fashions, do not extend backward beyond a couple of generations, to their teacher's teacher...This is a *chronocentric* position, assuming that one's own time or period represents the reference point; the equivalent in time of the spatial concept of ethnocentrism...Chronocentrism was the norm until well into the twentieth century (and still is in many conservatories), musicians honoring their historical lineage and believing they were preserving a style of interpretation that formed an unbroken chain of authority and orthodoxy.¹⁴

The term chronocentrism put into words what I have seen happen in readings throughout my musical career: people assume that the current tradition is the best one. This can be witnessed in

¹² Robert P. Morgan, "Tradition, Anxiety, and the Current Musical Scene," in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 59.

¹³ *Ibid*, 60.

¹⁴ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-first Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26.

luthiers trying to “improve” historical instruments or musicians playing with a more modern style to make it sound “better.” But where does this stop? Eventually, people will just reinvent the wheel. It can be a fun exercise to think about what composers of early music might change if they had access to the technology of today, but we should instead be shifting our focus on to the conditions of their time if we are striving to be “authentic.”

It is also important to keep in mind that the goals of Baroque music are different from the goals of music from any other period, especially from the music of today. Bruce Haynes writes on this point:

The goals of a Vivaldi concerto are quite different from those of Mozart, Beethoven, or Paganini; and to compare them is rewarding only in the context of their differing artistic aims. Most important of all, the evolutionary theory breaks down when it is associated with value judgments. A common assumption among musicians is that art evolves in a continuous line to the perfection of the present. This implies that the world of art today must be the best of all possible worlds—a conclusion most people would find difficult to agree with.¹⁵

Musicians who are striving to produce historically informed performances must shift their minds from thinking about modern music as the height of music. We should instead be focusing on how we can perform like the musicians of the time period the composition was written in. If we are focusing too much on the differences between the two periods, we are losing sight of the goal, which is to put on a performance informed by the practices of the time.

Robert P. Morgan makes an analogy in regards to language, which is useful because music is often seen as a language. When thinking about the music of the past, we have no native language, so we have to use foreign ones. We cannot deal with past musical traditions in our own

¹⁵ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-first Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

language, so we have to borrow from other languages. We must try to speak the language in its original terms. But since we are speaking a foreign language, we don't speak it as fluently as a native speaker would. More specifically, since there are no native speakers from that time period alive, we are trying to speak a dead language, so we have no idea how it sounds spoken fluently.

¹⁶ This is a great analogy describing the situation contemporary performers are in. They are blindly speaking this old musical language, with no way to confirm if it sounds fluent or not. Today, we can be informed of course by treatises and writings and old instruments, but we can never know exactly what the music sounded like back then. We can only try our best.

Continuing on the linguistic metaphor, Gary Tomlinson's view of history is that it should be a conversation between the "historian and the agents in the past [they] stud[y]."¹⁷ This is a good metaphor, but it assumes that the conversation can go both ways. Tomlinson counters: "The historian's agents are typically not alive to talk with him, and his conversation with them is not real conversation at all. Rather it is a colloquy in which the historian examines, ponders, and questions his subjects and then...supplies responses from them."¹⁸ This is not like studying a living culture through an anthropological lens where there can be a dialogue between the scholar and the subject. It is one-sided, and we can only study the documents we have available to us.

There has long been tension between scholars who want performers to remain faithful to the text to honor the composer's "wishes," and the performer who wants to add their own personal interpretation of the piece into the mix. Will Crutchfield writes about conductors that

¹⁶ Robert P. Morgan, "Tradition, Anxiety, and the Current Musical Scene," in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69.

¹⁷ Gary Tomlinson, "The Historian, The Performer, and Authentic Meaning in Music," in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 119-120.

are “subject to the will of the soloist,” citing an anecdote of a mezzo-soprano who added a “few passing elaborations” and was asked “Who is the great composer here, you or Mozart?”¹⁹ This conductor’s reaction illustrates how the scholar pushes against the performer’s personal interpretation of the music. Crutchfield is in favor of the performer: “Authenticity implies authority, and ultimately an author. The author of a performance—of a bow stroke, a crescendo, an impulse, a radiant act of absorption—is the performer, with whose condition we must be concerned if authenticity is what we’re after.”²⁰ It is, after all, the performer who ends up communicating the music to the audience, not the scholar (though occasionally a scholar-performer hybrid may enter the mix!). In all music, the performer’s interpretation is what makes it interesting, and it is not some bland procedure of communicating what the scholar believes is the composer’s “intent.” A performer should certainly use scholarship to inform their performance, but in the end, they have the final say on how it will be performed.

The issue of knowing or respecting a composer’s intentions can be problematic. Since they are not alive today, it can be difficult to assume their intentions; it is shaky grounds to stand on at best. Richard Taruskin writes about the composer's intentions: “We cannot know intentions, for many reasons—or rather, we cannot know we know them. Composers do not always express them. If they do express them, they may do so disingenuously. Or they may be honestly mistaken, owing to the passage of time or a not necessarily consciously experienced change of taste.”²¹ There are many factors at play that muddy the composer’s intentions. It is

¹⁹ Will Crutchfield, “Fashion, Conviction, and Performance Style in An Age of Revivals,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 21.

²⁰ Will Crutchfield, “Fashion, Conviction, and Performance Style in An Age of Revivals,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 26.

²¹ Richard Taruskin, “The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 145.

hard for even a modern-day performer to guess the intentions of a contemporary composer, let alone a composer from hundreds of years ago. To know a composer's intentions means to know them very intimately, and most performers and scholars cannot claim to know the composer in that way. There is context and details we can look at that may offer us some clues to what they meant, but we should never assume.

One specific element of historical performance practice that musicians are very familiar with is the use of vibrato. When performing in early music ensembles, vocalists and musicians alike are warned against the use of vibrato, because it is believed it was not used back then. This issue has been debated by scholars and performers, and Frederick Neumann has some revealing information about vibrato. He brings up two examples of writings about vocal vibrato, one from Michael Praetorius in 1619 and one from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.²² It was shocking to see vibrato brought up in sources from around Bach's time. I had assumed that it was something that was only developed in Romantic music. However, it seems that the vocal vibrato was different back then. Neumann writes that vocal vibrato "...develops spontaneously in most mature and in all artistically trained voices. For such a voice to sing non-vibrato involves a special effort and means fighting nature."²³ Mozart wrote in a letter to his father that "The human voice vibrates by itself, but in a way and to a degree that is beautiful—this is the nature of the voice, and one imitates it not only on wind instruments, but also on strings, and even on the clavichord..."²⁴ Mozart himself, although a product of the period after the Baroque period, appreciates vocal vibrato.

²² Frederick Neumann, *New Essays on Performance Practice*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1989), 173.

²³ *Ibid*, 171.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 172.

What's more, he states that vocal vibrato is imitated by instruments. Musicians often seek out a vocal quality in their playing, particularly in melody lines. There may be some credence to the argument of music teachers who nag their students about vibrato, though. Neumann suggests that the reason for the "ban on vocal vibrato" may be because boys' voices are naturally vibratoless,²⁵ and vibrato also apparently "passed in and out of fashion."²⁶ It is good to keep in mind that vibrato is just one aspect out of many that are used in performances. Still, a performer's choice to use vibrato or not can show their view on historical performance. Those who use it sparingly or are careful about it are more likely to have knowledge of this practice, while those who use it flamboyantly may not be aware of it.

Another aspect of performance that is debated is ensemble size. Joshua Rifkin's argument on chorus size is a famous one. Rifkin maintains that in choruses, each individual singer has their own copy of sheet music.²⁷ This means that if one copy of each voice part is found, there must have been one singer per part in the original performance. However, as he notes the choir size is an issue in his books, he says that it isn't the ultimate determining factor of historical correctness: "This itself does not prove such a performance historically correct; but for those who accept the interpretation of the evidence that I have outlined here, the musical gains come as a decided—and decidedly welcome—bonus."²⁸ Rifkin keeps in mind that the ensemble size is just one feature of a performance, and while important, shouldn't be the main point a performance is judged.

²⁵ Frederick Neumann, *New Essays on Performance Practice*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1989), 173.

²⁶ Peter Walls, "Strings," in *Performance Practice: Music After 1600*, ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 58.

²⁷ Joshua Rifkin, "Bach's Chorus: A Preliminary Report," *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1677 (1982): 747.

²⁸ *Ibid*: 754.

Neumann comments that Bach may have wanted more singers in the choir. “We have no reason to assume that Bach was averse to having more than twelve singers for his chorus (or no more than four, if we accept Joshua Rifkin’s arguments). The historically correct numbers...have a very limited value in ensuring the proper spirit of a work—provided the numbers used are within reason and balance the orchestra.”²⁹ He counters Rifkin’s argument to say that it is possible that Bach would have wanted more singers. He also suggests that the numbers are not important as long as they are balanced. Balance is a critical feature in a performance, and it is important to pay attention to which parts come to the front of a listener’s attention. If the accompaniment overwhelms a soloist in an aria, it may be difficult for the listener to take in the text and focus on the soloist. Whether a performance of 100 musicians or 10, balance is a significant feature of a performance.

Rhythm and tempo is another feature of the performance that could be affected by the interpretation. Bach’s music incorporated rhetoric in its use of rhythm and tempo:

However, just as speech was organised according to strict grammatic rules so was the freedom of rhythmic expression governed by the ‘rule of the metre [*sic*]’ indicated by the time signature and note values used. Only through keeping a clear pulse yet being flexible with rhythmic groups can a performer achieve ‘musical discourse’. In other words, this is the way to establish a direct connection between *oratio* (or *rhetoric*) and musical expression, the proclaimed goal of contemporary German music theory.³⁰

Getting the point of the words across was important in Bach’s cantatas. Like music, speech has a rhythm to it, and the proper rhythm and meter of a cantata are important in getting the meaning of the text across. If a performer decides that a slower tempo fits the piece better, they must make

²⁹ Frederick Neumann, *New Essays on Performance Practice*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1989), 170.

³⁰ Dorottya Fabian Somorjay, “Musicology and Performance Practice: In Search of a Historical Style with Bach Recordings,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 41, no. 1/3 (2000): 97.

sure the pulse does not drag. Likewise, a tempo that is too fast does not allow the listener to soak up the meaning of the lyrics but rather leaves them with a general impression of the music.

On the topic of instruments, Dorottya Fabian makes the point that historical instruments can only take the performance so far: the musicians need to incorporate historical playing style into their performance.³¹ Throughout the early music movement, there have been luthiers and historians who study how instruments were made back then, but the musicians need to know how to use them. It is the playing style that is more crucial to a historical performance than the instruments it is played on. Fabian writes:

The differing opinions of today, argues Finscher, show that a systematic attitude leads back to the fundamental problem: whether our aim is to find the character of the work or its historical characteristics. According to the answer, the concept 'historically true' must have a very different meaning. Finscher criticizes the fixation on the written form for—although scores, copies, engravings, editions, and published conventions are our most important sources—these cannot be our exclusive guides when we deal with works of art.³²

The idea here is that a focus on the physical aspects of a performance can distract from other characteristics that are more crucial to producing a historically accurate performance. However, historical or replica instruments do make it easier to apply the stylistic aspects of historical performance. The instruments should not be the main feature that the “authenticity” is based on.

³¹ Dorottya Fabian Somorjay, “Musicology and Performance Practice: In Search of a Historical Style with Bach Recordings,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 41, no. 1/3 (2000): 83-84.

³² Dorottya Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice, 1945-1975: A Comprehensive Review of Sound Recordings and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2017), 18-19.

Chapter 2: Out of the Depths and into Salvation

When I was a sophomore, I joined the Bard Baroque Ensemble under the direction of Alexander Bonus. I was immersed in a new world of music with a completely different style of playing. I had performed Baroque music before—the Bach cello suites, Vivaldi’s Four Seasons, Handel—but I had never before approached it with “authenticity” in mind. Through the ensemble, I was given a replica Baroque bow, and from there I learned playing techniques that were closer to what was believed to have been practiced in the Baroque period. I was instructed to play without vibrato, and to swell on long notes. I was told that playing open strings wasn’t taboo like it was in the symphony orchestra world. In addition to these playing techniques, I learned how to be a continuo player, and how to carry the intonation and tempo for the entire ensemble. I also learned about bass lines for improvisation. Our orchestra was more like a chamber ensemble, which required focus and attention on every member, but especially the continuo group.

In 2019, Renée Anne Louprette became the new director of the Baroque Ensemble, and Bard College president Leon Botstein charged us with performing Bach cantatas. This was great for me because I loved Bach. It was interesting to play continuo during a longer work where each movement had different instrumentation. Sometimes we were playing in large choral movements with the organ, and sometimes the continuo would only play with a soloist and a few obbligato instruments. We first performed BWV 198 “*Laß, Fürstin, laß noch einen Strahl,*” a secular funeral cantata, with some French baroque pieces by Marin Marais. Additionally, we performed these pieces in sacred spaces, such as the chapel at Bard College, and the Old Dutch Church in

Kingston. It was great to have the opportunity to perform in a church because Bach's sacred cantatas were originally performed during church services. We were not performing during a service, but it was still interesting to be an originally-intended setting for the cantatas.

For the spring 2020 semester, the Bard Baroque Ensemble was rehearsing Cantata 131 and Cantata 111. We were slated to perform them after spring break, but due to the pandemic and social distancing measures to control the spread of the virus, we were unable to perform them. When I returned in fall 2020, we were unable to rehearse in large groups and include the singers in our rehearsals. It is these two cantatas that I have chosen to analyze in my project, as I have experience rehearsing them with an ensemble. I hope that by looking at them from a performer's perspective, I can offer fresh insights into the different choices that are made during a performance.

These two cantatas were written at very different points in Bach's career, and they show how his work has developed over the years. Both of these works have a substantial performance history, and it was easy to find recordings of them from early in the historical performance movement up until the 21st century. I first experienced these cantatas as a continuo cellist rehearsing for the concert, and now I am looking at them through a music historian's lens. It is my goal to study these two pieces as both a performer and a scholar to better understand the interpretations in performances of them.

Bach's BWV 131 "*Aus der Tiefen*" is one of his earliest cantatas, and it is the earliest to survive in manuscript. It was written in 1707 or 1708. This cantata was commissioned by the pastor at the Marienkirche in Mühlhausen. The text indicates that this piece was written for mourning, which can give us a clue as to what occasion it was written for. In May 1707 there

was a major fire in Mühlhausen, so this work may have been for a memorial service at the Marienkirche.³³ The text of this cantata contains two sources, the first of which is Luther's translation of Psalm 130. The text in its entirety reads:

A Song of Ascents

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;
- 2 LORD, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
- 3 If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,
LORD, who could stand?
- 4 But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
- 5 I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
- 6 I wait for the LORD
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
- 7 Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
- 8 He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.³⁴

This psalm shows the narrative of being in “the depths” and calling out to the Lord for help. The speaker praises the Lord for being able to forgive their sins, but it is not without a long, tiring wait for salvation. In the end, there is hope for redemption from God. This psalm has themes of salvation and forgiveness. Some images to keep in mind are crying, waiting, and redemption. This psalm text forms the main text of the cantata. The Lutheran hymn “Herr Jesu Christ, du Höchstes Gut” is used as a cantus firmus and is sung by the upper voices during the two arias.

³³ “Cantata BWV 131: *Aus der Tiefen*,” The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, 24 July, 2020, <https://bach.org/education/cantata-bwv-131/>.

³⁴ “Psalm 130 NIV,” Bible Gateway, 24 July, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20130&version=NIV>.

This cantata is scored for SATB choir with tenor and bass soloists, oboe, violin, two violas, bassoon, and continuo. The bassoon part is notable here because it sometimes plays with the continuo and sometimes has its independent line.³⁵ The bass solo movement is accompanied by the altos on the cantus firmus, the oboe on the obbligato line, and basso continuo. The tenor solo movement is accompanied by the sopranos on the cantus firmus and the basso continuo without any obbligato instruments.

This piece is made up of five movements, alternating between chorales and arias. The movements in this cantata are less distinct than in his later cantatas. The first movement, a chorale, and the second movement, a bass aria, flow right into each other. We will see later in Cantata 111, a Leipzig cantata, that the movements are more distinct. The chorales also have multiple contrasting sections that are in different tempi. The first movement is in two sections. The introduction is an adagio, which moves to an exciting vivace section. This vivace then segues into the bass aria, which has the soprano on the cantus firmus and is accompanied by continuo and oboe. Then there is a choral movement again that begins with a brief adagio and then a largo section. The fourth movement is the tenor aria with the altos on the cantus firmus. This is accompanied only by the continuo, with no obbligato instruments. The final movement begins with an adagio and then moves into an allegro fugal section.

In the first movement, the adagio section uses the text “*Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir.*” (“Out of the depths I call, Lord, to you.”)³⁶ Before the vocalists enter, there is an

³⁵ “Cantata BWV 131: *Aus der Tiefen*,” The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, 24 July, 2020, <https://bach.org/education/cantata-bwv-131/>.

³⁶ “Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: ‘Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,’” Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

introductory duet between the violin and oboe. The vocal line here is also low and soft. The continuo consistently plays quarter notes throughout the section. This adagio section then moves right into a vivace with a new text: “*Herr, höre meine Stimme, laß deine Ohren merken auf die Stimme meines Flehens!*” (“Lord, hear my voice, let Your ears take note of the sound of my pleas!”)³⁷ Here, the voices become more hopeful, and their cries get louder and more excited. The calls get higher in pitch, and the continuo line shifts from continuous quarter notes to busy, running eighth notes in common time. This section is filled with the hope that God will hear our cries and save us from “the depths.” This movement segues right into the next one without a break in the continuo line. The continuo plays the same bassline as the second movement begins.

The bass soloist’s lyrics continue with Psalm 130, starting with the text: “*So du willst, Herr, Sünde zurechnen, Herr, wer wird bestehen?*” (“If thus You choose, Lord, to account for sins, Lord, who could remain?”)³⁸ The word *zurechnen*/account can also mean “to attribute” or “to record.” The speaker expresses that God knows they have sinned and has the power to choose not to forgive their sins. This line shows the power that God possesses over mankind. The soloist’s line also has sighing motifs of half and whole steps. The soprano line comes in on the cantus firmus in bar 7, verse 2 of the hymn “Herr Jesus Christ, du höchstes Gut.” “*Erbarm dich mein in solcher Last, Nimm sie aus meinem Herzen, Die weil du sie gebüßet hast Am Holz mit Todesschmerzen,*” (“Have mercy on me burdened so, take them out of my heart, since you have atoned for them on the wood with deathly agonies,”)³⁹ This line also references sinning and asking God for forgiveness. It also speaks to the power God has to rid the heart of sin. This

³⁷ “Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: ‘Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,’” Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

cantus firmus line moves in half and whole notes and is a calm, angelic voice above the bass soloist's voice and busy basso continuo.

The second section of the movement shifts from D minor to B-flat major. The soloist sings the text "*Denn bei dir ist die Vergebung, daß man dich fürchte.*" ("For forgiveness is with You, so that You might be held in awe.")⁴⁰ This is where the speaker starts praising God for the forgiveness of sins. On the word *fürchte*/awe, the soloist has a series of undulating sixteenth notes that sound like his voice is shaking when in the presence of God. This signifies the awe he has toward God, which could be a mixture of fear and respect. The cantus firmus line here is "*Auf daß ich nicht mit großem Weh In meinen Sünden untergeh, Noch ewiglich verzage*" ("so that, for great woe I might not perish in my sins, nor eternally despair.")⁴¹ This line further emphasizes the power God has to forgive sins and save us from suffering. It is interesting to see how Bach connects these two different texts in a way that makes sense with the narrative. This movement finishes with the reminder that God can forgive us for our sins.

The third movement starts with an adagio with the text "*Ich harre des Herrn*" ("I await the Lord.")⁴² At the very beginning of this movement, the chorus sings this text in homophonic block chords. These block chords will show up again in the final movement. By isolating the text to the same rhythm for all parts, it makes a strong statement about it. After the first iteration of this line, the alto sings the line again with an ascending solo-like figure on *harre*/await. This line sounds improvisatory and melismatic. This melisma emphasizes the "waiting" that the speaker

⁴⁰ "Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: 'Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,'" Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

has to go through before receiving salvation, but it sounds heavenly and hopeful instead of despairing. Also important to note, the psalm text shifts back into the first person during this movement. It appears in the score that this melisma is meant for the entire alto section to sing as a group, but it is soloistic. We will see that some performances opt to have a single vocalist on this line. After this first iteration, there is a second set of block chords by the whole chorus, and then another melisma sung by the tenor line. There is a third iteration of the block chords, and then it moves into the largo section.

This largo section begins with the text “*Meine Seele harret*” (“My soul waits.”)⁴³ It begins with the basses on this line, and then the tenors come in two bars later, imitating the basses. Then the altos come in, and finally the sopranos. On *harret* is a descending syncopated suspension figure. This long descending line shows how long the wait for salvation is. After all the parts come in and a rich musical texture is established, the text continues “*Und ich hoffe auf sein Wort*” (“And I hope in His word.”)⁴⁴ The violin and oboe play sixteenth-note figures in a duet. In the last three bars, the vocal parts come together again and the bassoon has an independent figure right before the final bar.

The fourth movement is a tenor aria that is accompanied by the continuo. The alto part is on the cantus firmus line. This movement is in 12/8 and is the longest movement in this cantata. The psalm text is “*Meine Seele wartet auf den Herrn von einer Morgenwache bis zu der andern*” (“My soul waits for the Lord from one morning watch to the other.”)⁴⁵ The length of this

⁴³ “Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: ‘Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,’” Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

movement emphasizes how long the speaker is waiting for the Lord. The span of time from “one morning watch to the other” is an entire day, which is a long time to be waiting. The 12/8 meter has a dance-like feel to it. This could be an example of a *siciliano*, which is a dance in 6/8 or 12/8 with a lilting feel to it. The basso continuo drives the 12/8 meter with eighth and dotted quarter notes. The alto comes in with verse 4 of the hymn, “*Und weil ich denn in meinem Sinn, Wie ich zuvor geklaget, Auch ein betrübter Sünder bin, Den sein Gewissen naget, Und wollte gern im Blute dein Von Sünden abgewaschen sein Wie David und Manasse.*” (“And since in my mind, as I lamented before, I am also a troubled sinner, whose conscience gnaws him, and would gladly, in Your blood be washed clean of sin, like David and Manassah.”)⁴⁶ In this line, the speaker is grappling with the fact that they have sinned, but they have hope that their sins can be cleansed from them. In the tenor soloist’s part, there is an emphasis on *wartet*/waiting. The soloist holds a single note on the first syllable and then executes some vocal runs. By stretching out the melody on this single word, it emphasizes the long period that the speaker has to wait before they are saved by God.

The final movement begins with three loud, triumphant block chords on “Israel!” This echoes the beginning of the third movement on “*Ich harre des Herrn.*” The entire chorus sings in unison. This is exciting after hearing the speaker of the previous movement sing about the long wait for salvation. In the next section, the tempo picks up, and the chorus sings “[*Israel*] *hoffe aus dem Herrn*” (“[Israel] hopes in the Lord.”)⁴⁷ Here the word *hoffe*/hope is emphasized with melismas on the first syllable being exchanged between the vocal parts. This section has a rich

⁴⁶ “Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: ‘Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,’” Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

instrumental and vocal texture, but the oboe and violins have a teetering sixteenth-note figure that rises above the rest of the ensemble, adding to the sense of excitement and urgency. The people of Israel are putting their hope in the Lord, and there is suspense as they are waiting to finally be redeemed of their sins. After this exciting section, the tempo switches to adagio and the text moves to “*Denn bei dem Herrn ist die Gnade...*” (“For mercy is with the Lord...”) ⁴⁸ This section is more tense and dramatic, with eighth notes in the upper strings and the oboe’s melodic line. Suddenly, there is an allegro section, and the bassoon takes off with sixteenth notes on its independent line. The chorus sings “*...und viel Erlösung bei ihm* (“...and much redemption.”) ⁴⁹ The key shifts to B-flat major with a step-wise ascent. Again, there is hope that redemption will come.

From here, the texture starts to become more intricate. The soprano line is isolated with the text “*Und er will Israel erlösen...*” (“And He will redeem Israel...”) ⁵⁰ There is a long vocal melisma on the word *erlösen*/redeem and then the basses come in. The basses continue the sopranos’ line “*...aus allen seinen Sünden.*” (“...from all its sins.”) ⁵¹ They sing in unison with the continuo on ascending half steps. The tenors then come in on the same text as the sopranos, and then the altos come in on the same text as the basses to complete the line. Here, Bach has a complicated fugal texture on the last lines of the psalm, with the outer voices (sopranos and basses) being imitated by the inner voices (tenors and altos). In measure 41, these voices change roles, starting with the basses singing the first half of the line, then the tenors singing the second

⁴⁸ “Bach Cantata Translations: BWV 131: ‘Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir,’” Emmanuel Music, 24 July, 2020, http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv131.htm.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

half in measure 43, the sopranos singing the second half in measure 49, and finally, the altos singing the first half in measure 51. All the voices switch over in this complicated fugal texture and continue to swap parts for the rest of the section. In the final measures, they all end up on “...aus allen seinen Sünden” (“...from all its sins”). The final three measures are an adagio section, and all the parts play block chords on these final words. The penultimate measure is filled with embellishments of the vocal, two viola, and oboe lines, adding suspense and a richer texture to the ending. The final cadence is not a perfect authentic cadence. It is a seventh chord built on a flat-major II, then a first-inversion minor vii, which leads directly to a major I, a Picardy third. This imperfect cadence on the word *Sünden*/sins could signify the damning nature of sinning, but ending on a picardy third shows that there is still hope that God can forgive our sins. This final movement drives home the meaning of the psalm text while showing Bach’s signature rich contrapuntal texture and his fugal composition skills. It demonstrates how sophisticated Bach’s compositions were early in his career.

I analyzed ten performances of this cantata recorded between 1981 to 2018, a span of almost forty years. I listened to recordings by important figures in the early music movement such as John Eliot Gardiner, as well as recordings from conservatories and of local Bach festivals. I have listed the ten recordings on the following page.

BWV 131 Recordings			
Director	Year	Ensemble	Forces
Nikolaus Harnoncourt	1981	Tölzer Knabenchor	Boy singers (alto and soprano), adult male singers (tenor and bass), oboe, violin, viola, cello, violone, organ, bassoon ⁵²
Phillipe Herreweghe	1992	Collegium Vocale	Mixed chorus, strings, organ, double bass, cello, lute/theorbo
Masaaki Suzuki	1996	Bach Collegium Japan	Women singers on soprano line, counter-tenor on alto line, oboe, strings, cello/gamba, organ, bassoon, violone ⁵³
Joshua Rifkin	1998	The Bach Ensemble	4 singers, bassoon, oboe, strings, organ
John Eliot Gardiner	2000	Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists	strings, oboe, bassoon, cello/gamba, organ, harpsichord
Ton Koopman	2007	The Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir	oboe, violin, viola, organ, bassoon, gamba/cello
Jos van Veldhoven	May 2015	Netherlands Bach Society	8 singers, counter-tenor on alto line, old oboe, theorbo, cello, DB, 1 violin, 2 gambas, bassoon, organ
Helmuth Rilling	August 2015	Weimar Bach Cantata Academy	strings, cello, bass, oboe, bassoon, organ
Douglas Buchanan	2016	Choir of St. David's, Baltimore, Maryland	8 singers, organ, strings, cello, oboe, bassoon
Francesco Rizzi	2018	Chamber Choir of the L. Cherubini Conservatory in Florence, Italy	DB, organ, 2 gambas, 1 violin, oboe, bassoon

⁵² Johann Sebastian Bach, "Das Kantatenwerk, Volume 32," Tölzer Knabenchor, Concentus Musicus Wien, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, 22 October, 1981, Teldec, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁵³ Johann Sebastian Bach, "J.S. Bach: Cantatas Vol. 2 (BWV 71, 106, 131)," Bach Collegium Japan, Masaaki Suzuki, November 1995, BIS CD-781, compact disc. Liner notes.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt's 1981 recording was the earliest recording of this cantata that I looked at. Most noticeable at first is his choice to use boy singers in the alto and soprano lines. Bach likely only had male singers available to him. This was due to the apostle Paul's writing in the Bible that said women should not speak in church. This belief was extended to singing, too.⁵⁴ Using boy singers is advantageous from a technical perspective because they can reach higher notes than adult males. Another option would be to use a falsettist to sing the alto parts, which requires special training and is a lost art in most of the world except for in England.⁵⁵ The boy voices are softer, giving an angelic effect to the music. In Harnoncourt's recording, the solo boy voice on the cantus firmus in the bass aria is so soft and angelic and soars above the bass soloist, something that cannot be accomplished by a male falsetto singer or a female singer.

However, scholars have pointed out that there are downsides to using boy singers in performances. Boy singers haven't had as much training as their adult counterparts, and therefore may not be up to the technical standards of Bach's music. In 1978, conductor Helmuth Rilling argued that boys were "emotionally not ready" to interpret the cantata texts, in addition to not being technically advanced enough.⁵⁶ Conductors certainly have to consider these points when choosing to use boy singers. Their cherubic voices have a beautiful effect, but they may not be at the point in their singing careers where they can interpret and perform such intricate pieces. In Harnoncourt's recording, I thought the young singers sounded terrific and they

⁵⁴ John Glenn Paton, "Who Sang Bach's Church Music?" *The Choral Journal* 25, no. 9 (1985): 9.

⁵⁵ Dorottya Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice, 1945-1975: A Comprehensive Review of Sound Recordings and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2017), 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 76.

executed the music very well. I can only imagine what a positive impact this experience had on these young musicians' artistry.

In the liner notes of this performance, Harnoncourt writes that they believed there was only one instrument per part.⁵⁷ This is in line with Joshua Rifkin's argument in terms of the choir size. Harnoncourt does not follow Rifkin's thinking for the choir, stating that the choir section had to be "reduced for this cantata,"⁵⁸ however it is unclear how much it is reduced. Also important to note, the recording space is very live, so the reverb makes the small ensemble sound louder.

The tempi Harnoncourt uses in this recording are overwhelmingly slow and stately. In the first movement, there is only a slight increase in tempo going from the adagio to the vivace section, yet it still feels grand. In the opening adagio section, the phrases are two bars long and shaped nicely. By giving some direction to the line, it gives life to the music in a slow tempo and doesn't feel like it's dragging. Harnoncourt's choice to shape the entire line rather than to emphasize the individual beats makes the music sound interesting in a slow tempo, which contrasts with some other recordings that opt for a slow tempo.

After the vivace section, the tempo speeds up slightly into the bass aria. Harnoncourt chose to use a soloist on the cantus firmus line. This makes sense in this context since the accompaniment is sparse in this recording. The continuo section here consists of a cellist and organist, while there is only one oboe on the obbligato line. The balance in this recording allows

⁵⁷ Johann Sebastian Bach, "Das Kantatenwerk, Volume 32," Tölzer Knabenchor, Concentus Musicus Wien, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, 22 October, 1981, Teldec, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the cantus firmus part to be more prominent than in other recordings which lets the listener focus more on its text. It also gives this solo movement a more intimate feel, contrasting with the large choral movements on either side of it.

The tempo of the largo section in the third movement is especially slow on “*Meine Seele harret...*” (“My soul waits”). I think this is a deliberate choice to show how excruciating the wait for salvation is. This tempo allows the staggered entrances with the syncopated half notes to be noticed more. The entrances of the soprano line on “*Meine Seele harret,*” which come in after all the other parts, are especially moving because of this. The high register and dissonant notes are noticeable to begin with, but by slowing down the tempo, the listener can really appreciate this effect. The upper voices use a slight portamento figure in this descending line which, while it may not be entirely historically accurate, emphasizes the dissonances. This slide also sounds like wailing, causing the music to have a greater emotional effect on the listener. This movement is performed in a way that emphasizes the harmonies of the music and causes the listener to feel the pain of waiting so long for salvation.

The tempo picks up slightly in the tenor aria. This recording leans into the dance-like nature of this movement, with the cellist in the continuo emphasizing the strong beats (Harnoncourt himself played the cello for the arias).⁵⁹ The soloist’s voice is not as legato as in the last movement, which adds contrast and makes it sound more relaxed. Again, the cantus firmus is sung by a solo voice that holds long notes high above the tenor soloist. The effect of paring down the players in this movement is strong since there are no obbligato instruments, only

⁵⁹ Johann Sebastian Bach, “Das Kantatenwerk, Volume 32,” Tölzer Knabenchor, Concentus Musicus Wien, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, 22 October, 1981, Teldec, compact disc. Liner notes.

a cellist and organist in the basso continuo. The organist is more elaborate in his realization of the bassline, adding more to the musical texture. But overall, this movement seems bare, especially in contrast to the previous chorale movement. I thought this instrumentation felt very intimate in this aria, and I liked how the tenor soloist and cantus firmus were about equal in volume.

The final movement begins with the exclamation of “Israel!,” but Harnoncourt performs it differently than the other recordings. The original rhythm is a dotted quarter note—eighth note—quarter note—quarter rest. Harnoncourt notes that they made this rhythm more pronounced, with a double-dotted quarter note—sixteenth note—quarter note—quarter rest.⁶⁰



This difference in articulation is due to how the music was notated in Bach’s time. According to Bach’s son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the note following a dotted note was supposed to be shorter.⁶¹ According to Robert Donington, “This arises from the laziness of composers in writing a breve or semibreve and leaving it to the performer to take it off as short as necessary to avoid confusing the harmony or obscuring a new entry.”⁶² Peter Holman writes that this type of notation “was used by composers as a type of shorthand to avoid notating complex rhythms precisely, particularly before the double dot became popular in the middle of the eighteenth

⁶⁰ Johann Sebastian Bach, “Das Kantatenwerk, Volume 32,” Tölzer Knabenchor, Concentus Musicus Wien, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, 22 October, 1981, Teldec, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁶¹ Robert Donington, “On Interpreting Early Music,” *Music & Letters* 28, no. 3 (1947): 224.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 226.

century.”⁶³ In the treatise written by Bach’s own son, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, it is written that “Short notes which follow dotted ones are always shorter in execution than their notated length. Hence it is superfluous to place strokes or dots over them.”⁶⁴ These nuances in baroque performance practice that aren’t overtly written in the texts themselves are important to keep in mind when performing. This part was notable since it’s the only recording to adjust the rhythm for this text.

In the following section, marked un poc’ allegro, the tempo picks up a bit, but it is still on the slow side. The tempo slows again in the adagio section, allowing the listener to hear each part and follow the harmonic progression. The allegro fugal section is again a bit faster, but the difference in tempo is slight. Again, this slow tempo could be to allow the listener to appreciate the counterpoint, but I felt that some variation in tempo would have made the movement more exciting. The final measures of this cantata are slow and grand, which shows off each part’s embellishments. It was customary to slow down in the last measures of a piece to show off the embellishments.⁶⁵

Harnoncourt’s performance has many aspects that make it sound more “authentic.” The use of boy singers was a bold decision, and it gave a beautiful effect. The balance of this recording was satisfactory and offered the listener a chance to take in the text. The slow tempo of the third movement follows an interpretation of the painful wait for salvation. Finally, the

⁶³ Peter Holman, “Notation and Interpretation,” in *A Performer’s Guide to Music of the Baroque Period*, ed. Anthony Burton (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2002), 39-40.

⁶⁴ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Michael (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949), 157.

⁶⁵ Frederick Neumann, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 71.

attention to detail in the dotted rhythms shows that the performers were in tune with the research on historical performance.

Another recording with a slow tempo is John Eliot Gardiner's, but his recording has a different effect. The opening movement of this cantata has a slow, steady tempo. Each quarter note is emphasized, which makes the tempo drag. This way of playing in the opening instrumental section was not exciting to me, as there was no interest in phrasing. When the vocalists start to enter, Gardiner uses soloists at first. In the first entrances, there are only soloists in measures 24-29. Then, in measure 32, the whole choir suddenly comes in. Measures 34-37, where the parts enter individually, he again uses soloists. In 37-39, the whole choir returns. It was an interesting choice to switch between soloists and choir. It added contrast to the musical interpretation. The chorus and soloists can also represent the difference between the group and the individual. When text is sung by a soloist, it can be seen as an individual's personal prayer. It's unclear if this is why Gardiner chose to use soloists in this opening movement, but it was a choice to stray from historical accuracy to present a different aesthetic idea or to represent the individual's voice.

The tempo picks up in the vivace section and becomes more lively. The emphasis is no longer on every single quarter note, and the phrases have more movement. Again, there is the alternation between soloists and chorus. The tempo slows down for the bass aria, though, and the articulation is more legato. We see an emphasis on the quarter notes again, and the cello in the continuo emphasizes the strong eighth notes on the downbows and plays the up bows lightly. The organist also employs a similar articulation. This adds some interest to the bassline and

keeps the music moving. In the melody, there was a good use of crescendos and decrescendos to carve out the line. These small things added more interest and movement to this performance with a slow tempo and a repetitive bassline. The bass soloist, Peter Harvey,⁶⁶ is technically skilled, and his duet with the oboe is powerful. The cantus firmus is sung by the soprano section as a group and sounds very faint in the background. This contrasts with Harnoncourt's recording, where the arias have a smaller ensemble of performers that have a more balanced sound, allowing the text of the cantus firmus a better chance of being heard and understood by the audience.

Gardiner sees the third movement of this cantata as the climax of the piece. "The emotional tug of the music (indeed, its penitential exaltation) is lodged in a succession of diminished sevenths, major and minor ninths that Bach strategically places on strong beats to emphasize the 'waiting' or 'yearning' sentiment. Each successive fugal entry gains in poignancy and heightened delivery as a result; each voice has a musical personality very much its own and really 'sings.'"⁶⁷ Gardiner's performance lives up to his words. In this movement, finally, the tempo doesn't drag and is an exciting experience for the listener. The melismas are sung by the soloists which contrasts more with the large block chords. The largo section has movement to it, and again the entrances are sung by soloists until the whole choir comes in. This helps shape the progressively more complex texture of the movement and adds suspense. The waiting doesn't seem as painful and trying here as it did with Harnoncourt. This fugue-like texture ends with a decrescendo as the voices fade away and then there is a small swell in the final two measures.

⁶⁶ Johann Sebastian Bach, "Bach Cantatas Vol. 3," Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, 23 July, 2000, *Soli Deo Gloria*, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁶⁷ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 142.

The contour of this movement is beautiful, and Gardiner really exploits the *Affekt* of this composition. The *Affekt* of a piece is the emotions that it is able to conjure in the listener, and is based on the *Affektenlehre* (Doctrine of Affections) that is the “doctrine that the role of music is to stir the feelings of composer, performer and audience alike.”⁶⁸ Gardiner’s overall implication with this interpretation is hopeful and optimistic, and that having faith that God will eventually save us from “the depths.”

The tenor aria begins with only the continuo, and they set the tone for the movement. They play with a more legato articulation, and the cellist slurs three notes. The organ realizes the bassline with longer notes and a smoother sound. While the strong beats are emphasized, Gardiner doesn’t go into dance-like territory. The tenor soloist’s voice is clear and legato, holding back on vibrato and letting the reverberation of the performance space add flavor to his voice. Rather than performing the aria like an energetic dance tune, this recording portrays it as a gentle, soothing dance. This interpretation is calm and blissful, perhaps reassuring the listener that help will come.

In the final movement of this recording, the opening block chords are steady and played at full value. In the *Un poc’ allegro* section, the text is echoed in pianissimo by the vocal soloists. This is an interesting way to use dynamics and adds more contrast to the “call and response” style that we will see later in the fugal section. Gardiner says that in the fugal section of this final movement, Bach finally “...distances himself from the earlier motet-like structures of his forebears’ music...”⁶⁹ To Gardiner, this movement represents what makes Bach stand out in his

⁶⁸ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 274.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 143.

generation and proves that he kept up with compositional trends. This complicated fugal texture is something that will be found in future Bach works. In the fugal section of the final movement, Gardiner again has solo singers on the entrances and doesn't bring in the full choir until the texture is full. There is a gradual decrescendo to the end of the movement, which has a great aesthetic effect.

Gardiner is a Bach scholar as well as a conductor, so his approach to this music may have been different from other conductors. He takes more liberties in the arrangement of the vocal parts, restricting them to a solo voice where he sees fit. I thought this was an interesting interpretation given the amount of scholarly research he has done on Bach's life and music. In his writing, he certainly praises Bach's compositional prowess in the chorale movements, but hardly says anything about the solo arias. This could show how he is more impressed with the emotions Bach is able to evoke from his audience in his large choral forms. I thought this was a refreshing approach to this work, and certainly different from how I was viewing it. But it is a critical point to consider: causing an emotional response in the listener is also crucial in getting the meaning of the text across in this "musical sermon." Looking at Gardiner's performance through this lens, in terms of the change in voice parts, one can see that his interpretation in this 2000 performance is more focused on the emotional aspects of the music, rather than blindly searching for "authenticity." While switching between solo and full-chorus within a voice part may not have been what Bach did at the time, it certainly helps the modern, more secular listener get closer to the emotional response that Bach was hoping to evoke.

The final performance of this cantata I will analyze is Jos van Veldhoven's, performed by the Netherlands Bach Society. This ensemble has a slightly different makeup from other ensembles. It is much smaller, and there are some different instrumentations. This performance has only eight singers, two on each part. The singers stand on the outer edges of the ensemble with the four soloists on one side and the supplemental singers on the other. There is one singer for each voice part on either side of the ensemble, which I imagine led to a full, surround sound effect in the performance space. This reduced ensemble size is closer to what Joshua Rifkin theorized about the number of vocalists Bach used.⁷⁰ The alto parts are sung by men that were trained to sing in the upper registers as countertenors. The alto soloist in particular has a very strong voice that doesn't seem to be straining to reach the high notes. The upper strings consist of a single violin and two viola da gambas in place of violas. The continuo group consists of an organ, cello, violone (an earlier version of the double bass), the bassoon, and a theorbo. Also worth noting, the oboe used is historical, and the string players use baroque bows. I like how they use historical instruments such as the theorbo and viola da gamba, which aren't commonly seen in performances and may be unfamiliar to the modern listener.

The opening tempo of the piece is steady, but there is contour to the phrases which emphasizes the high notes. Like Gardiner, at the beginning of the first movement, the vocal soloists enter first before the whole ensemble of singers. The continuo section is also reduced for this moment. This adds contrast between the soloists and the group. The tempo quickly changes in the vivace section, which is more energetic. Again, it alternates between the soloists and the

⁷⁰ Joshua Rifkin, "Bach's Chorus: A Preliminary Report," *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1677 (1982): 747.

group. They also use dynamics to shape the contour of the line and add contrast between repeated sections of the text, with a decrescendo into the last measures of the movement.

The tempo relaxes a little bit in the bass aria. The accompaniment here is rich and includes an oboe, a continuo section with a cello, organ, and theorbo, and two sopranos on the cantus firmus. This produces a full sound to support the soloist. The cantus firmus line is very soft, and it is hard to make out the text they are singing. When the word *fürchte* is reached in the text in measure 44, the character changes a bit, with the cellist accenting the eighth notes more. The soloist and oboe accent the high notes, contouring the sixteenth-note line on *fürchte*. This brings out the syncopation of this rhythm and intensifies the music here. This is in line with the fear the speaker feels when approaching the Lord. I thought this was a nice way to interpret this part, as it made the aria more interesting, and it showed another side of the character of the text.

In the third movement, the opening block chords start soft, swelling up to the second and fourth beats. Before the melismas, the continuo group holds onto the chords for a bit longer, overlapping with the melismas a little bit. This performance of the block chords was different in that they were played gently here, as opposed to being very strong to contrast with the melismas. The melismas are sung by soloists and are taken with a bit of liberty. The largo section begins with just the soloists entering, and the rest of the ensemble comes in as the movement progresses. This gradual increase in voices adds to the texture as it gets more complex. The tempo is steady, but it isn't too slow, and it definitely doesn't drag. The long-form dynamics and clear voices make this performance almost hypnotic. This interpretation makes the waiting seem long and tiring, but not as painful as Harnoncourt's performance.

The tenor aria is accompanied by the cello, violone, organ, and theorbo. This again adds a richer texture to the movement. The cantus firmus is sung with two people on the part. The movement is played lightly, and the continuo slurs two out of the three eighth notes. The articulation was more clear and it felt more like a dance movement, but it was still relaxed. The soloist gently leans into the 12/8 meter in his phrasing, emphasizing the high points of the phrases with his dynamics. This follows the interpretation of waiting in hopefulness instead of in pain.

The block chords at the start of the final movement again aren't strong; instead, they're more of a swell. The tempo picks up in the un poc' allegro section and gets more intense. The crescendos and decrescendos are quick, adding to the tense feeling of this section. The adagio sections slow down a lot, contrasting with the previous section. The allegro fugue section really plays with dynamics. Again, the individual section entrances are sung by a soloist before the whole group enters. The fugal section is played lightly, which adds suspense. The final chords of the piece are again swelled. By gently swelling these chords instead of accenting them, the effect isn't as jarring to the audience. Swelling long notes may actually be more closer to the performance practice of Bach's time.⁷¹ This also had to do with the shape of the bow, which curved outward instead of towards the bow hair.⁷² Instead of accenting the chords for an effect, the swell gives the note motion rather than remaining static.

Despite having fewer singers, the texture of this performance is very good. This performance is one of the more historically informed ones. It is also important to note that the

⁷¹ Peter Walls, "Strings," in *Performance Practice: Music After 1600*, ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 52-53.

⁷² *Ibid*, 49.

singers rarely use vibrato, if at all. The performance space was very reverberant, allowing the vocalists to shape the notes without vibrato, which in turn allowed the listener to really enjoy the tone of their voices. The effect is beautiful. Overall, this ensemble is informed about the performance practice of Bach's time, contributing to an excellent final result. They were able to use some authentic instruments along with performance techniques to create a more authentic sounding performance.

The first difference noted between these three performances is the makeup of the choir. Harnoncourt used boy singers for the alto and soprano parts, while the Netherlands Bach Society used an adult male contra-tenor for the alto parts. There are many things to consider here, such as the singers Bach had available to him and the technical abilities of the singers. Also different was the use of soloists versus the entire group. In some moments, the directors decided to alternate between soloists and the entire section to emphasize the entrances, as we saw in Gardiner and the Netherlands Bach Society. The solo arias also varied in the balance between the soloist and the cantus firmus line.

These three recordings also varied in tempo and the execution of the tempo. Harnoncourt's slower tempi were made interesting by emphasizing the longer phrase groups rather than individual beats in a measure, which we saw in the first two movements of Gardiner's recording. The difference in tempi in the third movement could be due to different interpretations of the text, with Gardiner's fast tempo sounding more hopeful and joyous and Harnoncourt's slow tempo sounding more painful and hopeless. Harnoncourt's was the only performance to employ double-dotting in the final movement because the single dotting notation was said to be

played shorter. The Netherlands Bach Society also paid attention to the historical performance practice that showed through their historical instruments, swelling of long chords, and ensemble size. This recording was the most historically informed performance. Gardiner's interpretation was overall more hopeful in waiting for salvation, while Harnoncourt and the Netherlands Bach Society made the waiting seem more painful and tiring.

Chapter 3: A Story of Faith in Life and Death

The next cantata I will analyze is BWV 111, “*Was mein Gott will, das g’scheh allzeit*” (“What my God wants, may it always happen”).⁷³ Cantata 111 was written for the third Sunday after Epiphany on January 25, 1725. It was written during Bach’s second year in Leipzig and was part of his second cycle of cantatas based on Lutheran hymns. The readings for that Sunday were Romans 12: 17-21 and Matthew 8: 1-13.⁷⁴ Romans 12: 17-21 is about treating your enemy with kindness and not taking revenge on them, and only God can decide how to punish them. Matthew 8: 1-13 is about Jesus healing a Roman officer’s servant. These two passages advise the reader to do what is right and to have faith in God. The occasion this cantata was written for contrasts with cantata 131. Cantata 131 was probably written for a special memorial service, not for a routine weekly service. Cantata 111 was also written later in Bach’s career and was part of a larger cycle of cantatas. This cantata shows how Bach’s style has matured over the years. This piece includes soprano and alto recitatives, a bass aria, and an alto-tenor duet aria.

The texts for movements 1 and 6 are from a hymn written by Markgraf Albrecht von Brandenburg (Albert, Duke of Prussia) in 1554.⁷⁵ This text begins with “*Was mein Gott will, das g’scheh allzeit*” (“What my God wants, may it always happen”). This shows a Christian’s faith in God and their trust in God’s will. The texts for movements 2 through 5 were written anonymously. The texts are mostly joyous and celebrate God’s saviourship, except for the soprano recitative which is a bit dark. Cantata 111 is scored for 4 vocal soloists (soprano, alto,

⁷³ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁷⁴ “Cantata BWV 111 - Details & Discography Part 1.” Bach Cantatas Website. Last modified 9 March, 2020, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/BWV111.htm>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

tenor, bass), a 4-part SATB choir, 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, and continuo. In the opening movement, the soprano sings the cantus firmus line, which is the tune of the hymn written by Albert, Duke of Prussia.

This cantata was written during Bach's time at Leipzig, in his Second Leipzig Cycle. For this cycle, the cantatas were all based on Lutheran hymns.⁷⁶ "Each work opens with an elaborate setting of the unaltered first strophe of the hymn on which the whole cantata is built. The following movements - recitatives, arias and duets - are textual paraphrases of the inner verses of the hymn, before the cantata concludes with a four-part harmonisation of the final strophe."⁷⁷ This is the general structure of these cantatas throughout this cycle.

For the structure of this cantata, Bach uses chorales for the first and final movements with solo movements in between. The final movement is a chorale set to the tune of the hymn, while the first movement is based on the harmonic structure of the hymn. This movement also follows the hymn structure, with a repeated "A" section in A minor, a "B" section in D minor, and then the "A" section returns in E minor. Finally, there is a *Dal segno* indication that returns back to the A minor "A" section. This hymn was written in *Barform*, which has a *Stollen* part and an *Abgesang* part. The *Stollen* is the first two melodic lines, and they are repeated. The remaining four lines make up the *Abgesang* part.⁷⁸ This hymn has an AABA structure. This exact hymn also shows up in other Bach compositions. It occurs in the St. Matthew's Passion, Cantata 72 "*Alles*

⁷⁶ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 318.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 319-320.

⁷⁸ "Cantata BWV 111 - Details & Discography Part 1." Bach Cantatas Website. Last modified 9 March, 2020, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/BWV111.htm>.

nur nach Gottes Willen / Everything according to God's will alone”, and Cantata 144 “*Nimm, was dein ist, und gehe hin / Take what is yours and go away.*”

The first movement is a choral fantasia movement. It begins with a recitative in the orchestra, and then the choir enters. The soprano sings the tune of the hymn on a cantus firmus line and the other voices follow in staggered entrances. The instrumental line is very busy with sixteenth-note runs, adding suspense and intensity to the piece. The melody in the oboe soars above the rest of the ensemble. The chorale line is made up of longer half, quarter, and eighth notes. The ritornello repeats between each verse which facilitates the switch in keys between the “A” and “B” sections. We will see that the final movement of this cantata is Bach’s harmonization of the chorale melody. I thought it was innovative of Bach to incorporate this melody into the cantus firmus and structure of the first movement but to disguise it in a way that wasn’t obvious.

The second movement is a bass aria with an awkward, hiccupy rhythm. The basso continuo line has eighth rests and uneven phrases, making the music sound hesitant. In this movement’s text, the speaker is telling his heart not to be terrified and to trust in God’s plans. “*Entsetze dich, mein Herze, nicht, / Gott ist dein Trost und Zuversicht / Und deiner Seele Leben.*” (“Do not be terrified, my heart, / God is your consolation and confidence / and life of your soul”).⁷⁹ The awkward rests and uneven phrasings may reflect the palpitations of a terrified heart. The soloist’s line also has uneven rhythms and rests and at some points, the ascending sixteenth notes sound like a quivering, uncertain voice. The aria has an A-B-A’ structure. The “B” section

⁷⁹ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

praises God: “*Ja, was sein weiser Rat bedacht, / Dem kann die Welt und Menschenmacht / Unmöglich widerstreben.*” (“Yes, what his wise counsel plans / is for the world and men's might / impossible to oppose”).⁸⁰ This section moves into the relative major key of G. Here, the speaker sounds more confident in what he is saying. The movement then returns back to the minor key in a brief recapitulation of the “A” section.

The next movement is an alto recitative, the first of two recitatives in the piece. In this short movement, the soloist is only accompanied by the basso continuo, which provides the harmonic structure beneath the soloist's line. The text here begins by detailing the ways in which God is omnipresent: “*O Törichter! der sich von Gott entzieht / Und wie ein Jonas dort / Vor Gottes Angesichte flieht; / Auch unser Denken ist ihm offenbar, / Und unsers Hauptes Haar / Hat er gezählet.*” (“O fool, who turns away from God / and like Jonah there / flees from God's face; / even our thoughts are known to him / and the hair of our head / he has counted”).⁸¹ The text references the biblical story of Jonah, who was called on by God to be a prophet and tried to escape. The text also makes an allusion to Luke 12:7, where Jesus tells a crowd about God's might: “Even the hairs of your head have all been counted.”⁸² The second half of the text implies that good things will come to those who are faithful to God. “*Wohl dem, der diesen Schutz erwählet / Im gläubigen Vertrauen, / Auf dessen Schluß und Wort / Mit Hoffnung und Geduld zu schauen.*” (“Happy is the person who has chosen this protection / in faithful trust, / and on his conclusion and word / looks with hope and patience”).⁸³ Recitatives are a powerful tool because

⁸⁰ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Luke 12:7 (TEV).

⁸³ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

they can relay text to an audience clearly. This belief that good things will happen to those who believe in God is a major aspect of Christianity. It was important that Bach communicated this point to the audience. The music itself is very tense and chromatic, adding to the scolding and foreboding tone of this recitative. However, at the end of the movement, it tells us we can seek comfort in God. This movement is a fitting precursor to the following movement, a relaxed, pastoral duet.

The fourth movement begins with a string ritornello section. There is a very distinct dotted eighth-sixteenth note rhythm that is constant throughout this section. It is important to note that the only accompaniment in this piece is the upper strings and continuo section, no chorus or other obbligato instruments. The text of this movement is optimistic, with a few mentions of death: “*So geh ich mit beherzten Schritten, / Auch wenn mich Gott zum Grabe führt*” (“Therefore I walk with emboldened steps / even when God leads me to the grave”).⁸⁴ The tenor enters first and then the alto joins in, echoing him. The image here of “emboldened steps” may be reflected in the dotted rhythm of this movement. After this first line of text, the string ritornello section repeats. From here, there is a B section that turns into E minor and becomes more complicated contrapuntally: “*Gott hat die Tage aufgeschrieben, / So wird, wenn seine Hand mich rührt, / Des Todes Bitterkeit vertrieben*” (“God has written down the days [of my life] / and so, when his hand touches me, / he will drive away the bitterness of death”).⁸⁵ This section briefly addresses the fear that one has when faced with death. It then returns to the G major ritornello section and the first line of text. This text has a positive attitude towards death; it

⁸⁴ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

is not something to be afraid of. Death inspires a lot of negative emotions, but this text is reassuring the audience that as long as you have God by your side, you shouldn't fear death. This is in line with the Christian belief that they will be reborn into heaven after they die. This is an interesting interpretation, especially coming from Bach, who lost his parents at an early age and lost many family members and children.⁸⁶ It sounds comforting in that as long as you act like a “good Christian” and believe in God, you are allowed into heaven. It does indeed “drive away the bitterness of death.”

The fifth movement is a soprano recitative with basso continuo and oboes. Like the alto recitative, the intervals are difficult and chromatic. The soloist's melodic line is above the instrumental line, which supports the harmonic structure of the movement. The text also deals with death: “*Drum wenn der Tod zuletzt den Geist / Noch mit Gewalt aus seinem Körper reißt, / So nimm ihn, Gott, in treue Vaterhände!*” (“Therefore when death finally / tears with force the spirit from its body, / then take it, God, in your fatherly hands!”).⁸⁷ Here the speaker has trust in God, even when approaching death. The soprano line leaps up in certain parts, accenting certain words. Here *Gewalt* (force) is accented. In the following lines, *Teufel* (the devil) is also accented. “*Wenn Teufel, Tod und Sünde mich bekriegt / Und meine Sterbekissen / Ein Kampfplatz werden müssen, / So hilf, damit in dir mein Glaube siegt!*” (“When the devil, death, and sin make war on me / and my deathbed / must become a battleground, / then help, so that in you my faith may conquer!”).⁸⁸ The text makes references to war and a battleground, adding to the dark tone of this movement. The “war” is not exactly against death, but also against sin, the devil, and the things

⁸⁶ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 146.

⁸⁷ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

that make death a negative thing for Christians. The soloist cries out to God to lead her away from a sinful life. Finally, the movement moves into a brief arioso section. The oboes play a melodic line, and the basso continuo plays lulling eighth notes under the text: “*O seliges, gewünschtes Ende!*” (“O blessed longed for end!”).⁸⁹ This is a perfect ending to the penultimate movement of this piece.

The final movement is a chorale based on the hymn “*Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit.*” The chorus and the instrumental ensemble all play together, and it reminds me of the last song of a church service with the entire congregation singing along. Gardiner discusses how Bach chooses to use the chorales in his cantatas:

...the choice and positioning of the chorale was critical. Normally it came at the end, like the final couplet in a Shakespearean sonnet where, after three quatrains in iambic pentameter, the focus narrows in a funnel-shaped conclusion. Bach needed to give similar prominence to the moment when doctrine, exposition and persuasive musical oratory had run their course and could give way to a communal prayer...Having set out the stages of his argument, Bach could bind the threads together and thereby create a resolution to life his listeners into the ‘now’ of collective singing, drawing on their sense of shared existence and values they held in common.⁹⁰

It makes sense that in this final chorale movement, the congregation would be singing along with the chorus. It involves the audience in the music and makes his message known one last time. The text of this movement is the final verse of the hymn. This movement is also in *Barform*. The A section starts with the first line of verse: “*Noch eins, Herr, will ich bitten dich, / Du wirst mir's nicht versagen.*” (“Just one thing, Lord, I want to ask you, / you will not deny it to me.”).⁹¹ This

⁸⁹ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁹⁰ John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 207.

⁹¹ Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

movement is in A minor, but it has an uplifting feel to it. The melody is mostly made up of simple quarter notes, but the lower voices harmonize using eighth notes, adding a richer texture. The melody of the A section repeats, but with a different text: “*Wenn mich der böse Geist anficht, Laß mich doch nicht verzagen*” (“when the evil spirit tempts me, / let me not despair”).⁹² The speaker is asking God to help them refrain from sinning.

The movement then moves into the B section: “*Hilf, steur und wehr, ach Gott, mein Herr, / Zu Ehren deinem Namen*” (“Help, guide and protect, ah God, my Lord, / to the honour of your name”).⁹³ The A section then repeats again, and the text emphasizes having faith in God one last time. “*Wer das begehrt, dem wird's gewährt; / Drauf sprech ich fröhlich: Amen*” (“Who desires this will have his wish granted; / for this reason I say joyfully: Amen”).⁹⁴ The score uses fermatas at the ends of phrases. Today, fermatas are used to indicate the prolonging of a note, but in Bach’s time, he was using fermatas to signify the end of a phrase, where a short pause or breath might be.⁹⁵ This change in the meaning of this notation over time can lead to some confusion for today’s musicians. This final chorale is the last opportunity to make an impression on the audience. Bach finally lays out the melody of this chorale and its basic form for the listener. Throughout this cantata, we have seen several movements with sophisticated forms, such as the opening movement which was based upon the chorale, and the duet aria. Bach also used recitatives to communicate the text to the audience. He also uses the music to echo images from the text, like the nervous heart in the bass aria and the strong marching rhythm of the aria

⁹² Francis Browne, “Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format].” Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Peter Holman, “Notation and Interpretation,” in *A Performer’s Guide to Music of the Baroque Period*, ed. Anthony Burton (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2002), 34.

duet. I think this shows how Bach is mastering the art of the cantata. He has found a way to connect the text with the music and keeps a common theme throughout all the movements. Thus this piece exemplifies a more mature composition than his earlier cantata.

I listened to eight examples of this piece, starting as early as 1972. I looked at some recordings by famous conductors, as well as lesser-known ensembles I found on YouTube. The details of the eight recordings are listed on the next page:

BWV 111 Recordings			
Director	Year	Ensemble	Forces
Karl Richter	1972	Munich Bach Choir, Munich Bach Orchestra	SATB soloists, choir, oboe, cello, double bass, bassoon, organ ⁹⁶
Nikolaus Harnoncourt	1979	Concentus Musicus Wien, Toelzer Knabenchor	Boy singers on soprano and alto line, SATB soloists, oboe, violin, viola, bassoon, cello, violone, organ ⁹⁷
John Eliot Gardiner	Jan 2000	Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists	SATB soloists, choir, violin, viola, oboe, harpsichord, organ, cello ⁹⁸
Ton Koopman	March 2000	Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir	SATB soloists, choir, violin, viola, oboe, cello, organ, lute ⁹⁹
Masaaki Suzuki	2006	Bach Collegium Japan	SATB soloists, choir, oboe, violin, viola, cello, double bass, bassoon, harpsichord, organ
Kamp Salamon	2010	Lutherania Choir, Weiner-Szász Chamber Symphony	SATB soloists, choir, violin, viola, cello, double bass, oboe, organ
Rudolf Lutz	2012	J.S. Bach Foundation Choir and Orchestra	SATB soloists, choir, violin, viola, oboe, bassoon, organ, cello, double bass
Kay Johannsen	2017	Stiftsbarock Stuttgart, Solistenensemble Stimmkunst	SATB soloists, choir, violin, viola, oboe, cello, double bass, organ

⁹⁶ Johann Sebastian Bach, “Bach Cantatas Vol. 1: Advent und Weihnachten,” Munich Bach Choir, Munich Bach Orchestra, Karl Richter, 1972, Archiv Produktion, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁹⁷ Johann Sebastian Bach, “Das Kantatenwerk, Volume 32,” Tölzer Knabenchor, Concentus Musicus Wien, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, 22 October, 1981, Teldec, compact disc. Liner notes.

⁹⁸ “Cantata BWV 111 - Details & Discography Part 1.” Bach Cantatas Website. Last modified 9 March, 2020, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/BWV111.htm>.

⁹⁹ Aryeh Oron, “Ton Koopman & Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Choir - Bach Cantatas & Other Vocal Works,” Bach Cantatas Website, last modified 21 May, 2019, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Performers/Koopman.htm#C12>.

Karl Richter's 1972 recording begins in a stately, 4/4 tempo. This ensemble has a large choir and a large string section, which may not be how it was originally performed. The first two quarter notes of the bar are emphasized and held longer than the rest of the notes. It also sounds like some vibrato is being used, both in the strings and oboes. This recording is nearly 50 years old and was made at a point when Bach scholarship wasn't as sophisticated as it is today. Still, there is the argument that Bach may have desired a larger performing ensemble, and maybe we can realize his intentions today. When the choir and pipe organ enter, we are overtaken by this full, grand sound, that stands out among the other recordings with smaller ensembles. However, there is a good dynamic contrast between the instrumental sections and the choral parts. The final cadence has a slight ritard, but it maintains this driving energy throughout the movement.

The bass aria begins at a much slower tempo than the previous movement. The accompaniment is the organ and the entire cello and bass section. This entails a lot of instruments to accompany one soloist, and the balance of sound was off. This uneven sound draws the listener away from the main part. The organist also adds more elaborations to the bass line on the right hand, making the texture even fuller. The soloist sings with vibrato and sings very legato. His performance sounds beautiful, but it just falls short of reflecting what we know of historical performance practice. The text and the rhythms of this movement seem to express the beating heart of the nervous speaker, but this recording does not show this. This recording has more Romantic influence, which impacts the delivery of this cantata's themes.

The next movement is the alto recitative. The tempo here is very slow, with each note held for a long time. This could be useful in making the words clear to the audience. Again, this recitative is accompanied by the cellos, bass, and organ. This recitative is not performed as *secco*

(dry), and the basso continuo holds the notes to their full length. In a recitative, the basso continuo parts often have tied half and whole notes. Laurence Dreyfus writes that this part would not be played as it is written but as quarter notes. “Instead, the bass players played quarter notes followed by rests until the next change of harmony.”¹⁰⁰ Here, the ensemble did not follow this tradition of shortening the held notes. Today, we are used to hearing *secco* recitatives, but this recording still holds on to Romantic influence. It makes the movement seem muddled, especially with such a large accompaniment. C.P.E. Bach writes “In recitatives with sustained accompanying instruments, the organ holds only the bass, the chords being quitted soon after they are struck.”¹⁰¹ This performance did not pay attention to the historical performance of recitatives.

Next is the duet aria with alto and tenor soloists. Again, the tempo here is much slower than in other recordings. Some later recordings sound more in 1, but this recording sounds clearly in 3, which makes it drag a bit. The strings play extremely legato, which makes the movement seem more relaxed. The soloists also use vibrato. This movement shows a lot of Romantic influence. This relaxed, legato style of performing is one of two different interpretations of this movement I heard while listening to recordings. While this performance may not evoke “emboldened steps” as much as others, this interpretation sees the calming side of walking with God like a companion. This movement sounds lighter than the previous movements, and that may have to do with the reduced accompaniment since this movement is only scored for strings.

¹⁰⁰ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach's Continuo Group: Players and Practices in His Vocal Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 72-73.

¹⁰¹ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Michael (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949), 422.

The next movement is the soprano recitative. The accompaniment has a good, strong attack at the beginning, which adds to the tense mood of this movement. The soloist uses a lot of vibrato in her performance. While this vibrato adds some drama to the music, it is not entirely historically accurate. The arioso section in the last few bars of the movement slows down a bit, and the soloist gets softer. This adds more anticipation going into the final movement. This is an example of a recitative that would not use the convention of shortening the long notes. If the continuo notes are held, this is indicated by a “piano” dynamic marking in the score. This is known as the *accompagnato* style, as opposed to the *secco* style with shortened notes. If there is no marking for a piano dynamic, “*obbligato*,” or “*arioso*,” then it is assumed by the player that the notes are shortened.¹⁰² Dreyfus remarks, “So powerful is the convention that when one wants the bass players to play as written, the composer must indicate a special marking to dictate that the normal practice be suspended.”¹⁰³ In this movement, it was correct to sustain the notes in the accompaniment.

In the final chorale, the entire ensemble joins in creating an enormous, full sound. Notably, in this performance, they took the fermatas to mean a lengthening of the note instead of the mark of the end of a phrase. By holding the last note in a phrase, it makes the end of the phrase sound more finite. There isn’t as much movement between the phrases when the ensemble keeps stopping at the end of each one. The balance is also off in this movement; it is difficult to hear the instruments under the choir. There is a *ritard* at the final cadence, which makes the sixteenth notes in the alto and tenor parts more pronounced.

¹⁰² Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach’s Continuo Group: Players and Practices in His Vocal Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 84.

Richter's performance was probably performed with the modern listener in mind. This interpretation didn't focus too much on the historical elements. The ensemble was large and was not balanced well. The first recitative was not played *secco*, which affected the sound of that movement. In the final movement, the fermatas were taken to mean held notes, which made the pace of the movement lag. This was an example of one of the less historically informed performances, and this interpretation played to a more modern, Romantic-minded listener.

Masaaki Suzuki's 1995 performance of Cantata 111 offers a fresh interpretation of this piece and was recorded once the early music movement had advanced quite a bit. The first movement has a much faster tempo than Rifkin's, which gives the music more energy. The articulation in the string section is varied between the short staccato eighth and sixteenth notes and the longer, more legato quarter notes. The dynamics here also have more variation, which makes this performance even more exciting. At the end of this movement, the *ritardando* doesn't slow down too much. Also noteworthy, this particular recording seems to have a good balance between parts.

In the second movement, the awkward rhythm has movement in the continuo part. The continuo is made up of organ, harpsichord, and cello, but they don't overpower the singer. This performance of this movement doesn't necessarily bring out the unsteadiness; instead, the music sounds smoother. The soloist varies his articulation. "Entsetze" is sharp and decided; the rest of the lyrics are smooth and together. The continuo, too, varies articulation, which is a characteristic that this recording focuses a lot on.

In the first recitative, the continuo group generally shortens the long notes, which is in keeping with Dreyfus's philosophy. In the first three measures up until the third beat of the third

measure, the notes are held long. This could be to establish the harmonic structure in the listener's ear. The singer also varies articulation. The first line "*O Thörichter! / der sich von Gott entzicht*" ("O fool, who turns away from God")¹⁰⁴ which the vocalist sings with a more articulated sound with narrow vibrato. Later in the text, when talking about God's graciousness and might, the articulation is more legato and connected, with less vibrato and more resonance. The use of vibrato at all is not entirely accurate, however, it was restrained.

The third movement starts off with strong, snappy articulation in the strings. While the dotted articulation is short, the longer notes in the violins are swelled and sound round, contrasting with the shorter articulation. The emphasis is the strongest on beat one, giving it a feel of being in 1. The strings also play with dynamics, contrasting the louder sections with sudden pianissimo sections. In measure 12, the strings get very quiet and begin a long crescendo to measure 21, before the vocalists enter. This kind of contouring makes this section, which repeats throughout this long piece, sound less tedious and holds the listener's attention. In this performance, this attention to detail makes it sound all the more magical and musical. The vocalists also pay close attention to shaping their lines. In the vocal entrances in measures 45 and 46, they start softly and begin to grow, echoing the phrasing of the strings. The vocalists in this movement also use less vibrato, which is a more authentic sound.

The tempo of the fifth movement is a bit slower than other recordings, but it picks up in the adagio section. The accompaniment is relatively full, with two oboes, cello, and harpsichord. They emphasize the chord changes on the second beat, and also shape phrases with dynamics. The third beat of measure 4 going into the first beat of measure 5 is emphasized, one the words

¹⁰⁴ Francis Browne, "Cantata BWV 111 - English Translation [Interlinear Format]." Bach Cantatas Website. Contributed January, 2003, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV111-Eng3.htm>.

“*Teufel*” and “*Sünde*,” “devil” and “sin,” respectively. It then decrescendos down to *piano* in measure 6. The adagio section remains very smooth with slurring in the bass notes to get that lulling feel. This is another example of attention to detail in the performance. The vocalist, as beautiful as her voice is, used vibrato in this movement. Finally, the last note is held longer in the cello like is written in the score, instead of being cut short.

The last movement begins with a tempo that doesn’t drag. The tempo keeps moving, and where the fermatas mark the ends of phrases, there is a short breath instead of long, held notes that halt the music. The exception is on the last “Amen,” where there is a huge *ritardando*. This makes the ending sound more final since there isn’t a grand final cadence in this chorale. It also gives time to the final embellishments in the alto and tenor.

This performance stands out because of its attention to detail and because it plays to the modern ear. The variation in articulation and shaping of the lines with dynamics really help bring the piece to life and keep it interesting. The contrast in articulation was very clean; the short, staccato notes and longer legato notes aren’t too jarring and fit with the lyrics. However, this contrast still sounds good to the modern ear. Also noteworthy was the balance between the parts; the instrumentalists didn’t outshine the vocalists and vice versa. This could be another product of modern recording systems. Unfortunately, the use of vibrato could also be because of this. Overall, Suzuki’s attention to detail really made this performance stand out.

The final recording I will analyze is directed by Kamp Salamon, performed by the Lutherania Choir and Weiner-Szász Chamber Symphony. Right away the ensemble size is quite large, with a violin section of 10 or more and tons of singers. The basso continuo section even includes 3 cellos and a double bass, along with the organ. This large group obviously makes the

sound much louder, but it can also become muddy and the dynamic changes can be less subtle. It clearly doesn't follow Rifkin's hypothesis with one voice on each part.¹⁰⁵ This performance takes place inside of a church and has plenty of reverb that could make it sound unclear. Shortening the articulation could help solve this problem, which it sounds like the ensemble did.

The tempo of the first movement is steady and not too fast. The stress is really on the individual beats, emphasizing the 4/4 meter. This slower tempo has the effect of focusing more on individual details, rather than the larger form of the movement that reflects the *Barform* form of the original hymn. While the tempo may be slower, it still has excitement to it that is brought by the instrumental dynamics and articulation. Like Suzuki, the violins also use dynamics to shape the line. In the opening four quarter notes, the first one is stressed the most and then is followed by a decrescendo. This adds interest to this repeating figure and makes it stand out more to the audience when this theme returns. In beats 3 and 4 of the penultimate bar, the eight notes are emphasized individually and the tempo slows down. It doesn't slow down enough though to make it sound final to keep the momentum up for the next movement.

The vocalist in this bass aria is accompanied by a cello and the organ. The balance in this movement is off; the soloist seems to be overpowering a bit and the continuo sounds far away. Also, the cellist uses vibrato in this movement, in addition to playing very legato. This doesn't match the idea of a trembling worshipper with a jumpy heart. The cellist's playing style sounds more Romantic and relaxed, which doesn't fit in with Bach or this particular movement. It would make sense here that the players are following the interpretation where the heart is being consoled by God's power. But this jolty, uneven rhythm is not communicating that.

¹⁰⁵ Joshua Rifkin, "Bach's Chorus: A Preliminary Report," *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1677 (1982): 747.

The cellist plays a quarter note on the first note and then doesn't come in again until the E# in measure 4. The organist plays the rest of the chords in measures, but very sparsely. The organ only plays short chords on the first where the harmonic changes occur in the solo line. This allows the vocalist to take her time, extending some breaths and slowing down during the phrases. She slows down when approaching the height of the phrase, like after the first beat of measure 4, or near the end of the phrase, like beat 4 of measure 5 going into the next measure. She also holds beat 1 of measure 8. This kind of scant accompaniment allows the alto to make more creative choices and show her soloistic abilities. Here I also have to criticize the cellist for using vibrato again. It would have brought the audience into the illusion more if the music had been played in a Baroque style. The final cadence is played in the continuo after the soloist finishes her final note. This is known as a "telescopic cadence," which was a convention of the time which had the soloist "hurry down toward a dramatic cadence..." and was not represented in the notation.¹⁰⁶ This performance proves that the ensemble was aware of this convention and had done their research. So I question why would the cellist use vibrato?

The next movement is the alto-tenor aria duet. The opening ritornello section has crisp articulation in the strings. The dotted rhythms in the strings are very strong. In measures 14-16, the violins have very snappy trills. The soloists use strong articulation in the dotted rhythms in their entrances. This strong articulation falls in line with the "emboldened steps" in the text. The emphasis of the beat is on the first beat, and the meter feels like it is in 1 instead of 3. This helps keep the music moving, and it doesn't drag like it would if each beat were emphasized equally. Measures 11-12 in the ritornello section have a decrescendo, and then there is a crescendo in

¹⁰⁶ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach's Continuo Group: Players and Practices in His Vocal Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 72.

measure 13. This, again, builds anticipation and keeps the listener's attention. The momentum in this movement doesn't stagnate, even though there is plenty of articulation throughout. Also important to note, the vocalists use a lot of vibrato, which is a more Romantic style of singing. Again, this one stylistic change would help it sound a lot more authentic. These details can make the performance sound more believable, and the vibrato can take the listener out of the illusion.

In the soprano recitative, the tempo marks a stark contrast between that of the former movement. The soloist uses very dramatic dynamics, accenting the high notes of the phrases. Her accents on the words "Teufel" and "Tod" (with the sharp "t's") in measure 4 are the strongest of all these performances. She doesn't hold back at all, and it makes this movement more intense and captivating. This all changes in measure 7 going into 8, on the phrase "*so hilf*" where she changes her character and becomes much softer and sweeter. She also takes more time, preparing for the lulling adagio section. This makes the transition into the arioso character much more smooth and it isn't as jarring for the listener. Unfortunately, this soloist also uses vocal vibrato, which follows the same problems with style as stated above. The accompanying instruments sustained their notes, which was in keeping with the tradition of *accompagnato* recitatives.¹⁰⁷ The accompaniment is more numerous than in the other recitative, with the oboes, cello section, double bass, and organ all playing. However, they do not overwhelm the soloist, and the balance is fine. The final measure with just the accompaniment has a big *ritardando* at almost half tempo.

For the final chorale, the entire ensemble joins in and the full sound comes back. The fermatas here are treated as the ends of phrases and are approached with a bit of *ritardando*, but are also held. This slowing down at the ends of phrases means the small embellishments are

¹⁰⁷ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach's Continuo Group: Players and Practices in His Vocal Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 73.

more prominent and the listener can appreciate them. There is a brief breath after the fermatas, and then the music continues. When the next phrase starts, the tempo picks up again and it doesn't drag too much, although if the fermatas were not held, there would be more momentum. After the second repeat of the A section after the second verse is sung, there is a longer pause before the B section. This is a great way to prepare the audience for the shift within the *Barform*. The ending is not too dramatic; it simply has a small ritardando. This ending is understated, and perhaps a bit too humble for a cantata.

Overall, this performance was full of amazing vocal soloists and attention to detail. There were a few places where the performers didn't pay close enough attention to historical accuracy, mainly with the use of vibrato, but also with the size of the ensemble. The tempi used in this performance varied, but the slower tempi didn't drag and lose the audience's interest. The performance was still very beautiful, but it wasn't completely historically informed. This choice to not remain completely historically "accurate" could have instead been a choice to illuminate the music, not necessarily in the same exact *way* the musicians of Bach's time would have, but to evoke the same *feelings* of the *audience*—one with modern ears. This is another possibility to consider.

Conclusion

These six recordings analyzed above offer a diverse range of interpretations across time and nation. These performers all had different goals in mind and had to sacrifice historical accuracy for them. Gardiner stood out in his interpretation of cantata 131 that waiting for salvation was a hopeful thing, and wasn't painful. Harnoncourt's recording stood out with his use of boy singers. Jos van Veldhoven employed adult male countertenors to sing the alto part.

The performances of cantata 111 seemed to have more variation in authenticity. These performances had large ensembles and used more vibrato, but they still stuck to some historical elements like performing *secco* recitatives. Some of these performances may have sacrificed historical "authenticity" to play to a more modern ear, or they just could not have been aware of the historical research. Masaaki Suzuki's performance showed how adding varying articulations could make a performance more pleasing to the ear.

What I learned after listening to these recordings is that the degree of historical "authenticity" depends on the interpretation and the goals of the performance. The decisions the performers make are dependent on what parts of these "musical sermons" they want to get across to the listener. Different interpretations of the texts yield different results. Some elements of historical performance may be used to illustrate the meaning the performers want to get across, and others may be excluded because of this. But all these musicians share the same goal of getting the meaning of the text across to the audience by evoking emotion. This was the reason the cantatas were performed originally. The listeners can pick out instances of "authentic" or "inauthentic" performance, but in the end, all that matters is what message they walked away

with, and how the music made them feel.

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